

By Susan Nicol Kyle

Firehouse.com

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The FIRE Act grant program reauthorization came another step closer to approval Wednesday when a House subcommittee agreed America's first responders need money to help protect their communities.

Rep. Harry Mitchell (D-Ariz.) introduced the House Resolution that was co-signed by 48 other members of Congress.

The measure passed favorably by voice vote, according to Alex Snider, committee spokesperson.

A full committee markup hearing on the bill is set for Oct. 21. The public may attend, but will not be permitted to speak.

In a prepared statement, Mitchell said: "This bill helps ensure that our firefighters have the tools and resources they need to prevent and fight fires and keep us safe. It will provide support to firefighters in stations and houses throughout the nation from large cities to small towns. While we can never thank our firefighters enough, we can work to ensure that they are equipped and prepared for their lifesaving work."

The committee agreed that AFG should be authorized for \$1 B per fiscal year from FY2010 to FY2014.

In addition, SAFER should be provided an authorization of \$1.194B for fiscal year from FY2010 to FY2014

The committee also specified the following requirements for SAFER:

- It sets the grant at three years (with the requirement that the department retain the hire for the entire three-year grant period).
- It sets the matching requirements at 20 percent per year of the grant.
- It eliminates an artificial cap on the maximum allowable grant size per firefighter.
- It includes an economic hardship waiver for departments that are unable to meet the matching requirements or maintenance of budget requirements.
- It also provides waivers for requirements that departments use the fund to supplement, rather supplant, local funds, as well as the requirement that the funds be used to hire additional firefighters rather than retain existing personnel.

Committee members also tentatively approved the proposal submitted by the major fire service organizations about how the money should be divided, the match requirements and caps.

